

Tulsa World reporter, state auditor recognized for revealing millions in questionable spending at Epic

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A Tulsa World reporter and Oklahoma's state auditor and inspector were recognized last week for their respective investigative work in uncovering questionable spending of millions in taxpayer dollars at Epic Charter School.

Staff writer Andrea Eger and State Auditor Cindy Byrd both received the Oklahoma Schools Advisory Council's "Outstanding Contribution to Education in Oklahoma Award" at the nonprofit organization's legislative luncheon on Dec. 5.

Byrd gave a detailed presentation on the Epic case, which she has called the largest abuse of taxpayer funds in the history of this state.

Her office's October 2020 investigative audit findings formed the basis for criminal charges in a massive racketeering case filed in June against Epic co-founders David Chaney and Ben Harris and their longtime chief financial officer, Josh Brock.

Byrd noted a number of Eger's news reports over a three-year period as critical to the investigation, including an in-depth February 2020 piece that revealed for the first time public records that showed Epic was sweeping tens of millions of taxpayer dollars into the private business accounts of the school's co-founders and shielding those expenditures from annual school audits and public scrutiny.

"Your investigative journalism exposed the Epic founders," Byrd told Eger at the event. "Following the release of the audit in 2020, for two years your reporting kept the public engaged and kept the pressure on the lead decision-makers, which led not only to the founders' arrest but also held the school accountable to make positive changes."

OSAC is a Muskogee-based organization with 270 member school districts, technology centers, colleges and universities that works to provide complete and accurate information about public education in Oklahoma to assist state legislators and Oklahoma's Congressional delegation.